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ABSTRACT

Tension and anxiety are prevalent among students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. With the rapidly changing population demographics of the United States and the significant growth of diverse multicultural groups, schools and professionals are being challenged as to how to provide the best comprehensive education to their increasingly diverse student populations. This paper describes how cooperative learning can be a powerful educational approach for helping all students attain content standards and develop interpersonal skills necessary for achieving success in a multicultural world. The paper focuses on three issues: (1) the effective elements of cooperative learning (i.e., positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, and social skills group processing; (2) theoretical research supporting cooperative learning and its positive influence for diverse students; and (3) implications for theory and practice of cooperative learning for diversity. (Contains 40 references.) (Author/SLD)

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Running head: Cooperative Learning

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Abstract

Tension and anxiety become prevalent among students from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. With the rapidly changing population demographics of the United States and the significant growth of diverse multicultural groups, schools and professionals are being challenged as to how to provide the best comprehensive educational to their increasingly diverse student populations. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to describe how cooperative learning is a powerful educational approach for helping all students attain content standards and develop interpersonal skills necessary for achieving success in a multicultural world. This paper focuses on three issues: (1) the essential elements of cooperative learning (i.e., positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, and social skills group processing); (2) theoretical research supporting cooperative learning and its positive influence on diversity; and, finally (3) implications for theory and practice on cooperative learning for diversity.

Theoretical Framework

Various theories have attempted to explain factors associated with cooperative approach in learning. For example, the motivational theories state that cooperative structures create a situation in which group members can only attain their own personal goals if the group is successful. Students must help and encourage each other to obtain the best result. Whereas the individual structures can lead to competitive situations in which one's success can be a discouragement for other students. The developmental theories also believe that students are more likely to raise their problem solving capabilities when working together with fellow students with comparable but slightly better capabilities (Crain, 1992). Moreover, cooperative learning is a natural outgrowth of social constructivism and a natural in the Matrix society in which Vygotsky was embedded. In fact social constructivism assumes that learning is a social process where learners learn from each other. Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development provides a conceptual basis for explaining the five basic tenets of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, small-group and interpersonal skills, and group self-evaluation (Doolittle, 1997). Moreover, Lewin's field theory provides the bases of important applied work on cooperative learning technique for making education multicultural (Maruyama, 1992).

In the following section first, I will focus on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development as the theoretical foundation for cooperative learning and second, I will focus on Lewin's field theory as the theoretical foundation for cooperative learning and multicultural education.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

The Vygotsky's zone of proximal development provides a conceptual basis for explaining the five basic tenets of cooperative learning: positive interdependence, face-to-face interaction, individual accountability, small-group and interpersonal skills, and group self-evaluation (Doolittle, 1997). Most cooperative learning advocates agree that for a teaching method to fit cooperative learning, it must employ the following five essential elements.

1. Positive interdependence.

This element of cooperative learning is achieved when each group member comes to understand and value the need for group cooperation in the attainment of his or her personal goals, the other group members' goals, and the goals of the entire group (Johnson & Johnson & Holubec & Roy, 1984). The construct of interdependence is a basic concept that underlying Vygotsky's sociogenetic theory. Vygotsky's theory rests upon the principle that a students' or adults' development is dependent upon interactions with other students and adults (Doolittle, 1997). That is, each member of a society is dependent upon other members of that society to provide the skills necessary for individual development.

2. Face to face interaction.

Face-to-face interaction is characterized by students providing each other with assistance, exchanging needed resources, and offering feedback (Johnson & Johnosn, 1991). According to Doolittle (1997), fact-to-face interaction is identified within the Vygotskian framework as social mediation and enculturation. Social mediation involves the acquisition of knowledge and skill through a student's social interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1987).

3. Individaul accountability.

Individual accountability involves holding each student should be accountable for completing his or her part of the assignment and for mastering the relevant material (Johnson et al, 1984). Within the framework of Vygotsky's theory, individual accountability would be reflected in each group member's being responsible for developing within his or her unique zone of proximal development. In this theory each member should grow and develop the sense of independence and to be able to do things independently, with no support or help from others (Doolittle, 1997).

4. Small group and interpersonal skills.

This element involves teaching students how to use the small group and interpersonal skills that are necessary to perform competently with others. These might include skills in conflict resolution, decision-making processes, effective leadership, and active listening. The acquisition of social skills in cooperative learning is what Vygotsky referred to when he stated that humans use socio-cultural signs (for instance, words and images) and tools (for instance, money and computers) to mediate and navigate their interaction with others. According to Vygotsky (1987), the sociogentic theory posits that the development of social skills is necessary.

5. Group self-evaluation.

The purpose of this element is to improve the productiveness of all group members as contributors to achieving the group's goals. For Vygotsky, an important part of instruction involves the constant monitoring of each student's growth within his or her zone of proximal development. So the student's development is not only the responsibility of that student, however it is the responsibility of those who are engaged with that student (e.g., teachers, parents, peers, etc.) (Doolittle, 1997).

Some other authors suggest additional elements necessary for cooperative learning. For instance, Aronson and Patnoe (1997) stress the need for heterogeneous groups. Diverse groups offer students with an opportunity to experience with others who are different from themselves. Additionally, Aronson and Patnoe (1997) advocate the group rewards in cooperative learning.

Lewinian principals

Although Kurt Lewin's contributions to education are often overlooked, he wrote frequently on the topics of education (Lewin, 1931). His ideas were basically come from field theory (Lewin, 1951). According to Maruyama (1992), Lewinian principals are applicable to the thinking of contemporary educational practices. First Lewinian principals call upon educators to recognize the range of different social forces that have shaped the views and values of various individuals, and consequently, to attempt to help students to understand the effects of those differences on their perceptions and judgments. Second, its call for a classroom climate where differences should be appreciated and well accepted. Third, these perspectives recognize the importance of classroom structures and interaction patterns in fostering individual development. Consistent with Lewin's concept of the space of free movement, the expanded roles of students in cooperatively structured classroom should advance their development as responsible and effective decision makers. The use of cooperative learning yields classrooms that are "student centered" rather than being "teacher centered". Consistent with Lewin's work on leadership, cooperative classroom are also are inherently democratic. Field theory has led researchers to focus on the individual within a social setting. Lewinian field theory can be used as a helpful source to implement multicultural education (Maruyama, 1992).

Empirical Research on Cooperative Learning and its Positive Influence on Diversity

In recent years, several factors have contributed to conflicts among students of different backgrounds (civil rights movement, the diversity of immigrants to the United States, and an increasing awareness of ethnic identity) (Romo, 1997). In fact tensions exist among different racial and ethnic groups although those groups live in the United States for generations. Group conflicts can affect academic achievement as well as social relationships (Romo, 1997). Stephan (1985) showed that anxiety about dealing with members of other racial or ethnic groups is prevalent among students and can direct behavior in ways that detract from academic achievement. Researchers in multiethnic schools have found that students tend to resegregate themselves in schools. For instance, ethnic groups may define particular area of the schools as "their territory " (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Moreover, London (1987) characterizes today's children as potential victims of a "psychosocial epidemic." He states that millions of American children are at risk because of rents in the social fabric of childhood. According to London, students today need help in managing their lives as well as they need to learn to view problems from the other person's point of view.

Pirrello's research data suggested the major factors that are related to the students' lack of appropriate social skills are " the role of schools has moved away from the place where moral values are taught, influence of the church and family may be weakening, lack of proper modeling of good social skills exists, lack of opportunities to practice using social skills exists, preoccupation with self is common, lack of sense of community is prevalent, negative influence of media exist, negative influences of peers is present, and there is a lack of discipline and obedience to legitimate authority" (1994, p. 18). Moreover, Maruyama (1992) also indicated that

anecdotal evidence from college campuses as well as schools suggests that students of the 1990s are becoming more ethnocentric and less sensitive toward others who are different, forcing school personnel to be peacemakers, conflict manager, and even social worker.

With the rapidly changing population demographics of the United States and the significant growth of diverse multicultural groups, schools and professionals are being challenged as to how to provide the best comprehensive educational to their increasingly diverse student populations. Professionals are challenged by the need to consider the impact of complex social/environmental problems, which may have negative consequences for children from various racial/ethnic and social class backgrounds (Kagan, 1993). In fact teachers are not alone in coping with the culture shock. Immigrant students, thrust into U.S. classrooms for the first time, and native English speakers, unable to communicate with newcomers in their school and unaware of how to respond to the differences they see, can become alienated from one another (Romo, 1997). So both students and teachers need strategies for helping them turn diversity into a positive force for developing themselves as individuals, as well as supporting the growth of others.

One-strategy teachers can employ to enlist the support of their students in simultaneously promoting academic and a behavioral skill is cooperatively structured learning (Aronson, 1978; Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Slavin, 1980). Cooperative learning is especially worthwhile for heterogeneous student populations, because it encourages liking and learning among students of various academic abilities, handicapping conditions, and racial and ethnic backgrounds (Johnson & Johnson & Maruyama, 1983). The literature recommended cooperative learning as a solution strategy for the lack of appropriate social skill among students. According to Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1990), experiences in working together to successfully

complete a task enhance social competencies, and the mastery of these social competencies is dependent of the practice. Berman's (1990) study indicated that many young people today lack a sense of community because they feel alienated from society and feel powerless to change it. Berman asserts that if young people are to learn social responsibility, it will have to be intentionally taught, even to the point of redesigning schools to stress empowerment, cooperation, compassion and respect. Additionally Kohn states, "By creating interdependence and a built-in incentive to help, cooperative learning promotes pro-social behavior" (1991, p. 504). Cooperative learning produces a caring commitment among students (Brandt, 1987). One of the five basic elements of cooperative learning is social skills in which "each student must communicate effectively, provide leadership for the group's work, build and maintain trust among group members, and resolve conflicts within the group constructively." (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, p. 80). For educators looking for ways to improve their schools, research syntheses provided solid evidence that both achievement outcomes and the social climate of the classroom could be improved if cooperative goal structures were used more frequently low achievers gain equally from cooperative learning experiences (Slavin, 1985). It seems logical to assume that working and learning together as members of a team would contribute positively to students' social skills and to their overall ability to interact successfully with others. Aronson et al. (1978) from the Jigsaw classroom concluded that children grew to like their group mates even more than others in the classroom. Similarly, Slavin (1987) found that students expressed greater liking for their classmates as a result of participating in cooperative learning methods. Several research studies have concluded that cooperative learning team increase students' self-esteem (see, for example, Slavin, 1987). Cooperative learning may lead to increased self-esteem because students have more friends and have more positive feelings about their school experiences and

academic achievement (Slavin, 1987, 1989). Additionally, a vast body of educational research has examined the effects of cooperative learning on student achievement and other related variables, such as self-esteem, positive attitudes toward others, ethnic relations, gender relations, and student retention (Totten, Sills, Digby, 1991). According Manning and Lucking (1991) people who help one another by joining forces to achieve a common goal generally feel more positively about each other and are willing to interact more positively when performing collective tasks.

Rather than treating academic learning and social or intergroup relations as two distinct entities, cooperative learning contributes positively to overall intergroup relations and, particularly, to improving relations with multicultural/multiethnic students (Sharan, 1985). According to Slavin (1983), cooperative learning increases contact between students, provides a feeling of group membership, engages learners in pleasant activities, and requires that team member work toward a common goal. In fact there are large numbers of studies that have indicated the role of cooperative learning in improving relations with multicultural/multiethnic students. For instance, Aronson et al. (1978) found that both black and Anglo students in cooperative learning situations liked school better than did the same ethnic groups in competitive classroom. Additionally, other research has suggested that working cooperatively seems to have particularly strong effects for Hispanic and black students, regardless of achievement levels (Slavin, 1987). A study of recent European and West Indian immigrants and Anglo-Canadians documented substantially more cross-ethnic friendships than in the control group (Slavin, 1983). Cooperative learning arrangements also appear to facilitate relationships between handicapped and regular students. The need for people to interact cooperatively and work toward group goals undoubtedly will increase during the twenty first century. Yet, American education traditionally

has emphasized individual competition and achievement, an approach that results in winners and losers and sometimes produces outright hostility among learners. Although research on competitive versus cooperative learning efforts can be traced to the early 1900s, considerable attention has focused on cooperative learning and its outcomes during the past two decades.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Ethnicity and race are important ways that students define themselves in the schools. Promoting positive inter-and intragroup relationships can further students' willingness to learn, promote academic achievement, and help youth prepare for successful lives in the large community and world of work. One way of improving intergroup relations are having students participate in joint activities. When people do things together they have opportunities to judge people on their own merits rather than on stereotypes (Romo, 1997). These contacts are most successful if the people involved are of equal social status, are working cooperatively on something, if their activity is supported by people in positions of authority, and if the activity involves a high level of intimacy (McLemore & Romo, 1998). Moreover, according to Slavin (1995), cooperative-learning methods can create thoughtful, equitable interactions needed to promote positive racial attitudes. Research suggests use of cooperative methods can result in improved cross-cultural relationship including increased cross-race friendships, reduction of inter-group bias, and inter-racial conflicts (Aronson & Patnoe, 1997).

This paper presents cooperative learning as a powerful educational approach for helping all students attain content standards and develop the interpersonal skills needed for succeeding in a multicultural world (Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Slavin, 1995; Aronson, 1978). Although cooperative learning has been relatively ignored, it is the most important and powerful way to structure learning situations. Cooperative learning methods have brought new principles instead

of continuing to view learning and social relations as separate domains requiring different programs and settings. Cooperative learning has been shown to produce numerous benefits for students including increased student achievement through development of critical thinking and through an increase in social interdependence and support (Slavin, 1996). Cooperative learning methods provide teachers with effective ways to respond to diverse students by promoting academic achievement and cross-cultural understanding (Kagan, 1993). Cooperative classrooms can radically change the entire social climate of a classroom so that minority child does not suffer the negative consequences of within class segregation (Watson & Rangel, 1996). Thus, I think all educators should prepare students for a world where social and interpersonal skills are emphasized. When students leave school, we hope that they have a healthier self-esteem in order to build and maintain career, family, and community relationships, and establish a basic and meaningful interdependence with other people, and to participate effectively in society. Educators need to increase their knowledge of cooperative learning and to be aware of its significance with the multicultural group. Teaching students to learn and work cooperatively in schools prepares them for a multicultural society in which they will live and work with people from whom they previously have been segregated and alienated (Watson & Rangel, 1996). Emphasizing cooperation over competition requires teacher to change their teaching roles from a conveyer of knowledge to a guide of learning events (Manning & Lucking, 1991). Additionally, implementing cooperative learning requires an understanding of the various types of cooperative learning (e.g., Learning together, Johnson and Johnson, 1989; Student Teams-Achievement Divisions, Slavin, 1987; Teams-Games-Tournament, DeVries and Slavin, 1978; Jigsaw, Aronson, Blaney, Stephan, Sikes; Jigsaw 2, Slavin, 1987; Team Assisted Individualized, Slavin, Leavey, and Madden, 1986; Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition, Madden, Slavin,

and Stevens, 1986; and group Investigation, Sharan and Sharan, 1989). Educators may need to be aware of that cooperative learning takes many forms and definitions, but most cooperative approaches involve small, heterogeneous teams, usually of four or five members, working together towards a group task and that the group task must be formally structured. So cooperative learning is not simply a matter of putting students in groups where one student does all the work and all others put their names on the product as well however, cooperative learning is much more than being physically near other students (Johnson & Johnson, 1993).

In the classroom setting, teachers can develop various strategies in which students can learn to depend on each other as they ask for and receive help from one another. This activity may help to eliminate the group differences. These differences often are the causes of prejudice between individual from different cultural background. Social skills could be taught in cooperative learning by having teachers model the positive interpersonal skills and have students practice the skills. Cooperative learning techniques have been successfully used in classes of all sizes. It also a good strategies for helping students turn diversity into a positive force for developing themselves as individuals, as well as supporting the growth of others. This paper, therefore, makes an important contribution in the area of theory development relative to the education of all children in a multicultural society.

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